

Halo: Collapse of an Empire

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Summary: My interpretation of the events leading up to the fall of the Forerunners.

## 1. Chapter 1

**\*\*Halo: Collapse of an Empire\*\***

**\*\*Prologue\*\***

A dense haze clouded Arken's vision. The atmosphere was thick with the putrid stench of death and decay. A single slimy insect had found it's way halfway up his leg; with a swift movement, he brushed it off the bright suit of armour, and into the dark undergrowth. Up ahead was a clearing, fading rays of sunshine merged with the artificial illumination of all manners of machines and mechanisms suspended in the air and delivered an otherworldly panorama. He smirked at his thought; but could not take the same amusement from the patent trap that lay in wait. Some way beyond it, a distant fire raged. Progress was good, then. He shouldered his rifle, eager to join battle, and lightly advanced across the dead, browning leaves, not making a sound, taking care to step around the enticing clearing.

The heat pounded down on his face and automatically, his helmet materialised. Raging foliage crashed down at his feet. Excellent; chaos was precisely the thing they'd all need in an operation like this. Close by, a man screamed. It was the scream of a coward, reassuring Arken that one of his comrades was in very close proximity; quickly scanning an area of burning debris, his sensors detected two lesser heat sources. The moving one concerned him, and hastily he skimmed along the scorched earth. He was met by the targeting reticle of his friend Maratt's weapon. Not entirely pleasant, but precisely what was needed. The other soldier lowered the rifle and through his helmet, flashed a smile. He gestured towards the blaze and together they progressed.

Their suits managed the soaring temperature well, the gauges on the

wrists rising slightly. Sparks flew from the flame-engulfed maintenance entrance of the structure. Maratt smashed it with his foot and the temperature gauge fell steadily as they bustled inside. The corridor lit up timidly as they silently trod along. Motion sensors tracked every movement, and although the system was in turmoil, neither could shake the feeling that they were being observed by a million prying and disapproving eyes. Maratt, the point man, suddenly jolted to the left and barged through another door. The gravity lift inside was still operational. Arken found himself trapped in the mental interface first; they sped to the top of the complex within seconds.

A plasma explosion shredded the doors before they had had time to open, and immediately the two soldiers were plunged into battle. The room was elongated and what was left of the ceiling was a long way up. Smoke obscured the view of the other side, rubble littered the floor and some larger pieces provided ample cover. They made for the nearest with an urgent haste. Fiernstone was sturdy stuff, and as Arken knew with a sinking feeling that whatever enemies were present were besieging their position, the knowledge could only serve as encouragement. Unclipping an antimatter grenade, Maratt squeezed and then hurled it over his shoulder in a huge arc. The light split the relative darkness, and both men leapt from behind the boulder with rifles drawn. Fear was dispelled with overpowering rushes of adrenaline and within moments the weapons flashed and more opponents screamed. It was not a fair match; the protection, training and weaponry of Arken and his friend was far superior to that which they faced, but the enemy could have any number of reinforcements. Now was the time to concentrate and not get ahead of themselves.

As two plasma bolts seared past, they were forced to promptly return to the defensible position. Arken had seen enough; the main terminal occupied the very centre of the room. Just what opposition would be guarding it could not change his mind. He snapped his fingers and withdrew a high-powered fission explosive from his in-built inventory pack. Maratt strafed out of cover once more and opened fire skilfully, blasts of hot plasma tearing through more of the enemy. Time to move. Arken hurdled over the rock and sprinted down the grand hall, maintaining a consistent line. More weapons dispersed, some from more of his allies in the opposite side. The darkness glowed artificially.

Maratt noticed the tall man about to pounce on Arken, and eliminated him with a movement of his finger. What he did not notice, however, was the figure who'd crept up behind him. Instantaneously, his weapon was knocked out of his gloves and he just managed to avoid a ferocious swing of a plasma blade. He assumed the only combat stance instructors had ever told him to use, feet shoulder-width apart at a forty-five degree angle, and at lightning pace strafed to the left and delivered a jab. The bulky man, faceless and featureless behind the dull armour he sported, was equal to the effort and swept away the attack as though it were from a child. His own strike was much more effective and had Maratt stumbling two paces back. The soldier lost balance. Quickly he gazed over to where his friend was almost at the terminal, and collapsed.

The enemy was on him within seconds, sword still brilliantly blazing. His temperature gauge was going insane, and he was suddenly afraid, having to roll over to avoid a downwards strike and then block the attempted elbow. Rolling over to the other side, the plasma blade

sliced through the armour and flesh of his arm, gashing deep and causing a stinging pain that he could not overcome. Confident of his victory, the other man rose up, the light catching the dull metal spookily, and delivered the finishing blow.

It came moments too late, as his brains exploded inside the helmet from the other side. The limp corpse slumped over Maratt, the last vision he had was of Arken's troubled face before he lost consciousness.

## 2. Chapter 2

### \*\*Chapter One\*\*

The presence of the colossal building ships spoiled the scene, the Commander thought. Already the battlefield was beginning to look better, although he couldn't be too trusting from the extreme vantage point. Glancing further north, the sky was brighter. A little too bright, perhaps; something would have to be done to further nullify the effects of the sun. The engineers were not usually so careless â€" a harsh analysis and he knew it.

He stood rigidly, hoping to delay the meeting for as long as possible. His short, dark hair was itchy with sweat and the inside of his slick, silver uniform felt slightly sticky and was uncomfortable. Such a situation was distressing even for a man as distinguished as himself, and he hadn't felt such tension since his first battles in the civil war of '76. The ominous clunk of heavy boots on the beautifully polished surface quenched his faint hopes of escape in an instant. He swallowed, trying to remain as calm as possible, and spun around with pin-point precision to meet General Kers with a salute across his body. At least the Commander had some composure left.

"I have to say, that was the worst and most costly field test I have ever seen or heard of," his superior rasped. He was considerably taller than the Commander, and indeed, most men, but it was not his fearsome size which could instil terror into even the most hardy and weathered of soldiers. He carried himself with an imposing authority and a sense of dignity he drew from his peers, maintaining a solid body shape at all times. For his age, he was still a very strong man, and he looked it, his bulky chest and a powerful stomach were covered by a large, tight-fitting body suit. It couldn't have been comfortable, but for a man so influential, comfort and relaxation were among his last concerns. Not that an occasional back massage would go unappreciated, however. His face was chiselled, slightly wrinkled and clean-shaven; medium-length silver hair flowed from the top of his head. On his shoulder was the red insignia of the army, luminous and particularly prominent in the synthetic light.

The Commander's desperate attempt to interrupt was cut short and he realised downheartedly that he could not resist. "Large areas of forest burned. Wildlife killed â€" alright, minor issues. What gets me is you wasted thirty damn good soldiers out there. Two are left in intensive care; a further two suffered lesser injuries. You've twenty seconds â€" better make this good."

"The â€" the entire unit was at fault, sir," he stammered, feeling the dark, prying, calculating eyes glaring down upon his every feature and ready to pounce at any second, "The assault team was

misinformed. The rebels were issued with non-lethal weapons and they hijacked the rifles. They incapacitated the escort and occupied the tower. We were powerless to stop them; subsequently we had to send in the strike team. Call me irresponsible, but to be frank, I'm not the one you should be blaming for this." He cringed as he let the final sentence slip and braced himself.

Yes, something had snapped in Kers. He stood up to his full height, puffed out his chest as subtly as he could, and his face got much redder. It seemed as though he would explode "as amusing as that image would usually be, the Commander dared not laugh.

"Not your fault? You're a Commander," he boomed, "And not only that " you're a Commander of one of the most proven battle units in the army. And you won't even accept the slightest bit of responsibility for poor preparation? You're a disgrace."

The huge man reached out with lightning speed and pressed into the touch-sensitive panel above the Commander's breast. Instantly the print was read, and the display image faded to a paler black shade of the insignia. Only one demotion and not nearly as much yelling as he had anticipated beforehand; something to be thankful for, at least.

The General scoffed and marched off. He seemed pre-occupied; that outburst certainly did not live up to his notorious reputation for dressing-downs, and judging by the manner in which he took his leave, it had ended somewhat prematurely.. Something big was happening in the military hierarchy, and the now-Captain was confident that it went beyond the ring system. It was upsetting that he dared not try to probe further. At least nothing remained hidden from the persistent media for too long, so he'd find out soon enough; in fact, they were probably illegally scanning the station right now.

He figured it was best to keep out of sight for a while, and paced up and down the room, observing the beautiful sight that was the Seventh Ring in front of him. The magnificently lush terrain was wonderfully presented. It was designed to be especially alluring from the Vacuum, and it succeeded. Perhaps better than anyone had anticipated, but that couldn't be a bad thing. Ten minutes of near-perfect calm had passed before the door graced open and two men strode in. Neither seemed special nor particularly interesting, two more bland faces that he'd no doubt have to deal with.

"Sir," one said.

"Yes?"

"We're the new recruits, Com " Captain. We're supposed to report to you and then engage in basic training 01 down in VT."

"Alright." He led them out of the room and into a gleaming corridor, and was beginning to warm to the talkative one by the time the gravity lift had delivered them to the Virtual Training sub-facility. The fountain-esque walls became akin to an enclosing cliff-face and the trio made their way through an archway an into the fully-synthesised environment. Rays of streaming bright sunlight greeted them through the leaves of a forest. Somewhere in the vicinity, two simultaneous explosions shook the earth. No weapons presented themselves, hand-to-hand combat it was; the session would

be a long one.

"Date 00000004768, Chorvan 00, Unnamed System

Massies,

Your creation is, in a word, fantastic. Despite all the recent technological developments, it is this which impresses me the most. I am quite baffled as to how exactly it operates, you are undoubtedly a genius " but that is not the purpose of this transmission.

On Jarvan 82, the crystal alerted us to a small activity hive on a remote colonial-potent planet. Since the teleportation grid was down (and alas, remains so), we had to make our way here with the Intrepid. The planet and it's sun are newly formed, and the system contains many other bodies although they are all minor in comparison with this one. What's curious is that life has already bloomed. But what's more curious still, is that it has faded away just as quickly.

We arrived on Jarvan 86. Two cycles before entry into the system, the crystal's patterns changed. The activity increased slightly, and then faded. We do not yet know why, but the investigation is becoming interesting.

By Jarvan 87 we had the standard equipment set up on the surface. There was a village or town, primitive but stable. The machines returned evidence of fire, mud housing as well as hunting and some rituals. Basic culture, indeed, but their rate of progress had been extraordinary. Tools have been developed. It seems that this race, as humanoid as they may be, is herbivore. It would also seem that they are the only animal species on this world. Not even micro-organisms are present, but plant-life is plentiful.

The landscape is not all too dissimilar from that of our own planets. The grass is green, a gentle river flows nearby, and huge mountains loom in the distance. A lush forest pertains to a large swamp; nothing spectacular, I'm sure you'll agree. The settlement in question is located in a shallow valley, with plenty of cloud cover during the day and enough light when required.

Since 87, we have been busy. The machines are at current scanning the entire planet, but our hopes of them finding anything worthwhile are wearing thin. Tomorrow we send out expeditions. It's like the people were just erased from existence, their last movements were confined to a very localised area and there are absolutely no signs of them moving elsewhere.

I don't know what to make of it, and I'm hoping you do. If you have anything of value, please respond, else you'd be well-advised to work on this teleportation problem; I'm sure even the architects could use somebody of your calibre. I mean it.

-BADSE Aritese Lor"

Massies Umor had been tossing the message over in his mind for the past four cycles. He had requested it in audio, visual, and even text, and the A.I. had delivered. It remained silent, as it's master preferred, while he studied and studied. Every shred of evidence on premature life & evolution, colonial-potent planets and systems, and

the destruction of cultures was displayed about his module. BADSE had seen similar civilisations, but this one in particular must have progressed much more rapidly than any on record.

There was nothing he could use. A vault of information was irrelevant because of this new phenomena; but it was nothing to be upset about, this was the stuff he lived for. The A.I. read his thoughts and he had it compile a basic plan of operation to file in the main network. He was convinced that it was nothing too important, but maybe a few senior councillors would be keeping up with his progress, and he made sure that his A.I. had encrypted a hint about the transport grid before returning to his vessel. That gave him a sense of mental pride in a competition he felt he was engaged in with the architects, but that same pride was too great for him ever to admit to it.

The crystal was also something to be extremely proud of. A black project, known to only the very top of the council, it had taken him a long time to complete, but clearly his efforts were well worth it. All the time it seemed that his peers were keeping him under wraps while the architects went ahead and took the spotlight. However, he knew better than anyone that science and development was not competition and sometimes shamed himself. The module faded around him and he found himself in the cockpit.

Moments later the A.I. had plotted the most direct and efficient route to the newly-discovered system. Messies sat back and grabbed some sleep. After all, such a long period of hard concentration was a challenge even for a mind as strong as his.

End  
file.